

STAFF REPORT

Date: January 10, 2018

To: Mayor and City Council

Thru: Sabra Newby, City Manager

Subject: J.2. Staff Report (For Possible Action): Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff on possible code and/or policy changes related to the installation of rooftop solar systems.

From: Dan Holly, Building and Safety Manager

Summary: In an effort to review concerns raised about the process for installation of rooftop solar systems, staff conducted research and inspections across the city on rooftop solar installation permitted. Staff requests that Council accept the presentation and provide direction on proposed options related to rooftop solar installation regulations and policies.

Background: Staff was asked to research current rooftop solar installation standards and processes in response to a concern raised by Councilmember Paul McKenzie that consumers may not know the condition of their roof prior to installing a rooftop solar system, leading to additional costs for the homeowner to reinstall solar panels when the roof needs major repairs or replacement. Staff has reviewed the current activity and building approval processes related to rooftop solar systems, conducted initial outreach with several professionals in the building and construction industry, and provided the Council with several options for changes to the current processes, if so desired.

Discussion: Between July 1, 2015 and October 12, 2017, the City of Reno has issued 424 building permits for solar installations at residential locations. Roof-mounted systems are the most common with 403 of the permits for rooftop solar installations.

Under the current process, a building permit is considered when plans for the project are submitted to the City's Building and Safety Division in Community Development. Typically, the permit is requested by a solar panel installation company on behalf of a homeowner. The approval process includes a review of the application with installation plans, permitting, and inspection. During the review of the application, the City looks at the structural integrity of the roof and verifies the roof's ability to handle the added weight. However, the roof analysis does not determine life expectancy of the roof or the integrity of the roof covering. Following installation, the City inspects the installation to ensure the project was completed according to

code and the approved plans.

If Council deems a change is needed to the current approval and/or inspection process, several options have been provided for consideration:

- A. **Ordinance** – Create an ordinance to require a detailed roof inspection prior to installation of a rooftop solar system.
- B. **Rooftop Solar Permit Policy and Acknowledgement Form** – Develop and implement a City policy that involves informing homeowners of possible risks prior to installation and requires a signed acknowledgement form prior to issuance of permit.

In addition to other options that may be identified during Council discussion, Council may determine that changes to current processes are not desired.

Financial Implications: Depending on the option pursued, there is the potential for a minor increase in building permit review time and workload.

Legal Implications: Legal review completed for compliance with City procedures and Nevada Law.

Recommendation: Staff recommends Council review the different options related to the permitting processes of rooftop solar projects and identify the preferred direction.

Proposed Motions:

- (1) I move to accept staff presentation and direct staff to move forward with implementing a City policy that involves informing homeowners of possible risks prior to rooftop solar installation and require a signed acknowledgement form prior to issuance of permit.
- (2) I move to accept staff presentation and direct staff to move forward with initiating the Business Impact Statement process and drafting an ordinance that would require detailed roof inspections prior to installation of a rooftop solar system.
- (3) I move to accept staff presentation and direct staff to keep the current building permit process for rooftop solar installations.

Attachments:

- Rooftop Solar Permits Presentation - FINAL (PDF)